Richard Yamashiro

Richard sits in the barracks room of the Japanese American Museum of San Jose. The room was modeled after a Tule Lake barrack.

“My dad had to get rid of his business. I think that was really hard for him ‘cause he worked so hard. I didn’t realize this until I was much older but that was the hardest thing for him. And that made him kind of bitter, too.”

Getting to speak with Richard Yamashiro is a remarkable experience. At 91 years young, Richard still works a job and has the energy and spunk of someone twenty years his junior. On the other side of his current work badge, he has inserted a small photo of himself from Tule Lake (which happens to look more like a mugshot) so that people will know that "I was in a concentration camp."

Richard is able to paint an accurate picture of all the critical phases of his life, from his pre-war childhood in Hollywood with two progressive Issei parents, to his family's uprooting to Manzanar, then Tule Lake and Hiroshima, his formative years into adulthood were profoundly shaped by a war that villainized his parents' home country. Richard — who had never been to Japan at the time the war broke out — felt staunchly American, resulting in friction with his father who wanted to leave the United States. Giving up his hard-earned business, the family home, and being put into camp was simply too much to withstand. Richard is now able to reconcile with his father's perspective, realizing the impossible situation he faced. "I didn't realize this until I was much older but that was the hardest thing for him. That's why he took me back to Japan. He says, 'I want to go back to my own country, where this will never happen to me again.'"

I'm Richard Yamashiro and my birthday is February 13, 1929. I was born in Seattle, Washington.

Can you describe a typical day growing up in Seattle?

Oh, when I was in Seattle, I was just a baby. And I don't remember anything about Seattle 'cause when I was growing up, they moved down to Los

Angeles. And my mom and dad went to Hollywood and so Hollywood is where I grew up, partially.

Can you talk about your parents a little bit? Where did they meet? And where were they from?

Yeah, I looked at that question and I think they met in Seattle. I know, but I don't know. I think it was probably an arranged wedding, but I'm not sure because they never talked about it.

They were both Issei?

Yeah, they were Issei. But my mom was something else. My mom, you couldn't believe, she wasn't a typical Issei because she spoke English, she went to night school, Hollywood High. We bought a car. She drove the car, not my dad. You know, everything that the usual Issei lady doesn't do, she did. So, she was something else.

She took classes at Hollywood High night school like ceramic drawing, fashion drawing, tailoring. She spoke enough English where she understood everything. When I saw her at grammar school, I knew I was in trouble [*laughs*].

Were they both from the same prefecture in Japan?

No. Why? My mom was from Hiroshima. She was born in a place called Yano. And my dad was from Okinawa. I think he was a sailor and he got off at Seattle.

So they met there and moved to L.A.

Yeah. They got married. And then I guess, see my grandfather was still alive. And he kind of had the whole family together, including my mom. And so he was growing hops in Seattle, Washington. And he got very restless. So he picks up the family and they move down to L.A. and he grows strawberries, you know he's a farmer. So that's why we ended up in L.A.

That was your mom's dad.

He was something else, too. He took his family all over because he went down to Los Angeles for a while and he was ranching and then he got tired of that so he packed up his family and moved to Japan. And then he was in Japan. And when Japan was invading China and all those places, they didn't have enough military troops to occupy the country. So Japan was asking for civilian volunteers to go to Manchuria and stuff and farm. So he takes his family to Manchuria. And then after the war, well he had to hustle and get back to Japan before the Russians came. Yeah, but he made it back.

Wow and then once again went?

Yeah, well he came back. He's lucky because he lives in Hiroshima. He lived in a farmland about 30, 40 miles from Hiroshima City. And he got a big sliver in his toe and he couldn't walk. So the day that they dropped the bomb, he had apartments in Hiroshima City so he was supposed to go collect the rent, but he couldn't walk so he stayed home. That's what kept him alive. He was a hardy old soul. I guess I kind of take after him 'cause he lived to 98. You know he was, he was a hardy guy because he could sit there and drink an *isho* of sake by himself.

I used to see him when he used to come and visit. He would sit there and my mom would run out and get an *isho* of sake. She'd go to the kitchen, heat it up, bring it in, and he'd be sitting in the living room drinking sake. Pretty soon he goes, "clunk," and my mom brings a futon, just covers him.

Another thing was, he surprised a lot of the people, the occupation people in Japan, the American occupation, because he spoke English. But he dressed like an old Japanese farmer. He's just standing there and people are talkin', he could understand what they're saying.

So both your grandpa and your mom were very, kind of ahead of their time almost.

Oh yeah. My mom was way ahead of her time. You didn't see any Issei ladies driving a car! The husband always drove the car.

Right, right. What kind of person was your dad?

He was very quiet. He didn't talk very much. When he did I'd have to listen. He was a concert violinist. I don't know how he became a concert violinist but my mom was the piano accompanist. That was in Seattle, he worked at a jewelry store. And he did this violin thing, so I heard. And when we moved to L.A., I guess he opened a fruit and vegetable stand in a store. But he taught violin to people that wanted to learn. And they used to come to the house. And he used to teach violin.

Do you remember hearing that?

I remember that. And the thing was, he tried to teach me. Never try to learn from your dad [*laughs*].

That didn't work so well?

He tried for two years and I still don't know how to play the violin. But you know, he's really stern. I had to practice. And if I made a mistake, you know the Japanese [scowls].

It's worse for your own child. You're stricter, right? And then your mother, too, was a pianist — she played as well?

Yeah I guess she played. I wasn't aware then because I was too young. When we were living in Hollywood, she was working [as a] domestic. But like I said, she spoke English so you know, she could go anywhere.

And did you have siblings?

I had one sister. Yeah. She passed away, so.

Was this your older or younger sister?

Older.

And so what kind of community were you growing up in in Hollywood?

Well it was a pretty nice community, it was mostly caucasians. You know,

and there were about five or six Japanese families there. And we even had a Chinese movie star. I don't know if you've ever heard of Anna May Wong? She lived on our street. And we had this family, became famous. John Aiso. He was the judge for O.J. Simpson. He lived a couple of doors up. It was a nice neighborhood, you know. And I never felt discriminated against, it was nice, you could just go play with the caucasian kids, we played football, kick the can.

You were friends with all of these other kids in the neighborhood.

Yeah. But, you know, there weren't too many kids my age. So it was kind of hard. There was one kid that was my age, we kind of grew up together, and his parents sent him to Japan.

So everyone was mostly older than you?

Yeah. And my sister was no fun because I don't want to play girl's games all the time. But I did; hopscotch, Jacks, and jump rope. But usually, I fend for myself and I would pack a lunch and I'd go hiking up the Hollywood Hills. And I used to hike up to the Griffith Park Observatory. That was my favorite place to go. And once or twice I hiked up to the Hollywoodland sign. And I used to hike up there by myself because there's nothing else to do.

So you just kind of enjoyed being on your own.

Yeah, I guess I'm pretty easy to accommodate 'cause I just do my own thing.

So at the time of, say 1941, your mom was working as a domestic and your dad had the fruit and vegetable stand. Did you feel like it was a pretty comfortable life?

I felt comfortable. I guess my mom felt comfortable, my dad had to work pretty hard. But as far as I could remember, they seemed to be pretty happy, We weren't rich or anything, but we made out and never starved and always had clothes. So, yeah, it was a good life, I thought.

So what do you remember about the day Pearl Harbor happened?

Oh, that was terrible. I had these Caucasian friends that we would go fly model airplanes. And they took me down to Gardena. And we're flying model airplanes and all of a sudden I hear somebody say, "The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor!" I go, where the heck is Pearl Harbor? I didn't know what Pearl Harbor was. And everybody kept saying this and I felt kind of bad because I'm Japanese, you know. And so my friends felt it, too. So they packed up and we left. But it was kind of weird.

So then you went home and your parents —

Well, my dad, he kind of blamed Roosevelt, because he said they're the kind of hard on Japan with all the embargoes and all this stuff. And so, that's just what he told me one time. I was too young. It's just that, one day I'm an American next day I'm a "Jap." And that was a weird feeling for me because Monday after when I went to school, it was horrible. You know, all the kids are saying "Jap this, Jap that." You know I just felt like, you know, 'cause I am one. But I survived.

Michael Sera: Did the kids at school treat you any differently?

Not really I didn't feel it.

MS: Because even though you're Japanese — your friends didn't teach you like the enemy, if you will.

Well, some of the kids looked at me kind of funny, you know. I was just starting to go to junior high school.

And you were one of the only Japanese American kids in the class?

Yeah. There weren't too many in there.

And so did your mom and dad have a conversation, either with you and your sister, or do you remember?

I don't remember them saying anything except they talked about Japan, and it wasn't their fault. They had to do it. You know, that Japanese

propaganda, so. Other than that it was a terrible experience for me. All of a sudden, I'm the enemy. And the thing of it is like, I didn't feel any discrimination at all while I growing up in Hollywood. Except one time when I was in grammar school, this kid used to tease me about slanty eyes and all this stuff and I told him to quit and stop it but he kept going, so I punched him out [*laughs*]. And he goes running home, brings back his mom and dad. He has a black eye. And in the meantime they call my mom, and I knew I was in trouble. But I told 'em I told that guy, "Leave me alone, to just be quiet." So he got in trouble, not me.

Oh, that's good.

Other than that I had no problems with it. I used to sit around with my Italian friends and when we were supposed to go to camp he says, "Well, I guess we're going to be next." It never happened, right? [*laughs*]. I don't know why they didn't do it to the Germans or Italians. That's what I kept thinking, you know. But it's just that we're different. We're talking and we didn't know why we had to go to camp.

Something I always think is interesting is you know, December 7th. The holidays were coming up right after, and it's Christmas. Do you remember anything about that time?

No, I don't really remember. We just had Christmas, I guess, as usual. My uncle was there, too. You asked [what are] some of the fond memories? My uncle had this Ford, rumble seat, and I used to love to ride the rumble seat and we'd go to the beach, you know, I'm sitting in the back. I used to love to sit in that rumble seat, catch the air, you know?

Can we get your parents names and then your sister's name?

My mother's name was Tomiko. And my father's name was Eiro. My sister's name was Lillian, Yoshiko. It's another thing. My mom when she registered me for school it was my Japanese name. My English name wasn't even included. Yeah so all through my childhood, I was Eiichi Yamashiro. And try to go to school and have the teacher call the roll.

MS: So when did you pick up Richard?

After camp. Yeah I go, this is too much. So I changed my name to Richard E. Yamashiro.

MS: So you always had Richard as a name.

Yeah, it's my middle name. I just switched it.

But in camp I would assume everyone would be okay calling you Eiichi.

Yeah, but you know, we had caucasian teachers. And they couldn't say Eiichi.

So at the time of the executive order, when that came out, what did your family have to do to prepare for that?

Well, my dad had to get rid of his business. I think that was really hard for him 'cause he worked so hard. I didn't realize this until I was much older but that was the hardest thing for him. And that made him kind of bitter, too. Because he felt, that's why he took me back to Japan. He says, "I want to go back to my own country, where this will never happen to me again." And I didn't understand that at that time because I said, "Dad, I don't want to go to Japan because that's your country, not my country. I was born and raised here." He said he didn't care. So him and me became, we were at odds for a long time, you know, 'cause I didn't go to Japan. But at 16 I didn't have a choice, I was a minor.

Yeah, and my mom, she was busy sorting things out and trying to sell stuff. But it was horrible. I remember people coming in and offering peanuts for your stuff. I don't know if mom did it but I remember some people who had these Japanese dish sets, they'd take them in the back and they'd break them all into pieces 'cause they don't want to sell it for. But my mom had enough sense to take all the family pictures and stuff and bring it with us.

So she didn't burn anything.

No she didn't burn. I don't think she could do it 'cause that had a lot of memories for her. So, my son has album or I would've brought it and showed you.

And did your dad's business have a name?

No it was in a store. Yeah. And he ran the fruit and vegetable part of it. The other guy had a grocery part.

Where was that located?

Hollywood. On Sunset Boulevard.

When you actually had to leave for camp, did you go to an assembly center?

No. See, my uncle lived by the Hollywood Bowl. And so we had an option of going with him, or him going with us. And they said that his group would go straight to Manzanar. Our group would go to Santa Anita. And she says, "Oh, I don't want to move twice." And so opted to go with him straight to Manzanar, which was smart.

I don't remember the date, but I remember they put us on a bus, Greyhound bus and pulled the shades down so people wouldn't see us, I guess or I don't know. I couldn't understand why we had to pull the shades down. You know whether they didn't want people see us or they didn't want us to see them.

What was the mood like for your family at this time?

Well, my dad was kind of upset. My mom was, but she kinda — you know the Japanese *gaman* and you know, all that stuff.

And your sister at this time, how old is she?

She's two years older than me. But she didn't say anything. She's just the quiet type.

Did you communicate with your parents mostly in English or did you speak Japanese?

Half and half. My mom was speaking English and all of a sudden she'd switched to Japanese back to English. You know, she couldn't just say something she would tell me in Japanese. I'll tell you something funny. When I was in the army, she used to write me letters and I'm reading the letter and all of a sudden I go like this [Richard motions turning paper clockwise]. And my friends are saying, "What are you doing?" I says, "Well, my mom starts off in English and then when she gets stuck she writes in Japanese so I gotta tip it over like this" [*laughs*].

So did you grow up pretty much bilingual? Did you speak Japanese?

Oh, yeah. They made us go to Japanese school. That was the routine for the Japanese who were living around there because they sent all their kids to Japanese school. And I used to hate it because Saturday we had to spend all day at Japanese school. And all the other kids are playing and I'm getting on the bus going to Japanese school. And Japanese school was like Japan, you know with the ruler and stuff? I hated it, but you know, didn't have a choice. But it kind of helped to learn Japanese 'cause it came in handy later when we went to Japan. But I'm starting to forget most of my Japanese because I have nobody to talk to now. I have nobody to talk to because for me, my mom was alive. I could talk to her, when my mother in law was alive, I could talk to her. When I worked at Hewlett Packard I had a bunch of Japanese war brides and I could talk to them. My kids don't speak Japanese.

How many kids do you have?

I have three boys. I always wanted a girl, which I never got. And my youngest son got married and he gave me three granddaughters. My granddaughters are something else.

So going into Manzanar, what were some of the most vivid memories that you have of actually arriving and seeing the landscape?

You know when you get there you think wow, what a desolate place in the middle of the desert. And the experience of going through the barbed wire fence and having a guard towers there was something else. For a young kid

you think, what am I doing here?

So it was shocking.

It was shocking! You know, I'm not used to living in a barbed wire compound with guard towers, with weapons pointed at you. But like I said, I got used to it. I even snuck out [*laughs*].

When did you start doing that?

It was probably about a year. Probably about a year or two later.

Rows of barracks in Manzanar

Do you remember your block and your barrack?

Yeah. Block 34. Building five. I think it was "A."

What did you do on some of those first days? You were all with your parents, how did you kind of manage to live in the barrack?

It was kind of hard because when we first got to Manzanar, they were short of barracks. And so they stuck us in this room with another family, just one of the little rooms and then they put a blanket in between, and there's four of us and three of them, because that was the first baby born in Manzanar. It was something else.

And then had to get used to going to the bathroom. And I think it was hard for my mom because they're not used to going out there and they have four or five commodes all lined up. And you just sit there with your neighbor, you know? Guys, you get used to it. But I think my mom and them had a hard time with that. You're taking a community shower, you know. That didn't bother me.

Yeah for the women it was harder.

Yeah I think for the women it was difficult. A lot of them had the *chamba* because in Manzanar it snowed. And if you wanted to go to the bathroom you had to get out of the barracks and walk down to the bathroom. So that became a common thing. That was hard on my parents, I think. My mom.

Absolutely.

It was tough. They could at least put partitions but no, it's just commodes lined up.

Very dehumanizing.

Very, very much.

Did your parents end up working in camp?

In Manzanar my father became a policeman. So I couldn't get into trouble [*laughs*]. And my mother, I think she worked in the mess hall. I'm not sure, most of the people worked in a mess hall, so.

Richard and his sister in Manzanar. This photo was taken by Sadao Munemori, famed 442nd RCT soldier who was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously after saving two of his comrades in battle.

[But] yeah he became a policeman. So I had to behave myself. And they had cars, but mostly with the American security people, we still had security people in there that drove around. I had a picture, but I don't know what happened to it. But Sadao [Munemori, Medal of Honor recipient] took a picture of my mom and my dad. My dad had the policeman's uniform on. My dad had a thing for uniforms.

He just wanted to kind of get involved in the community?

I guess, I guess. You know, he's from Okinawa so he knew karate and stuff, too. I don't know why he became a cop.

And he got paid for that, right?

Yeah. You know, the professionals got $19 and the workers got $16. And I worked at Manzanar and I got part-time, you know.

What did you do?

I was a busboy in the hospital. You know, I wanted to do something. And you heard of the big Manzanar riot? Well this is right after the riot, I got the job there.

So what do you remember about that?

I remember how it started because they first of all somebody got beat up, this guy from JACL. He got beat up at home because the people - what do you all those people - the hardcore Japanese people. They said he was an *inu* [dog] so they went to his house and beat him up. And the police arrested some people I don't know if they got the right people, but they stuck 'em in a jail, down below. And they had a big meeting in the fire break at night. And since there's no street lights or anything, you know, it's pitch dark.

I don't know who called the meeting. I remember we went because we're curious and people started saying this guy is an *inu*, this guy's an *inu* and they knew where he lived and all that. And at the end, they said, okay we're going to divide up and we're gonna go over to these places and beat them up. And in the meantime, the security people got all the names and addresses and went around and picked them all up because they had cars. So they didn't find anybody. So they said, "Well, the guy that got originally beat up, he was supposedly in the hospital. And the hospital was one block up from where I lived. So we went up to see what was going to go on because the crowd started going to the hospital.

And I remember doing this one guard there with a rifle. He said, "Halt." And I thought, oh, this guy's not going to stop. He kept going. I thought, I'm going to see somebody get shot. But there were so many Japanese people around, the guard was scared. And so the guy just walked up, and pushed the rifle aside and kept going. He didn't get shot. And they searched the hospital. He wasn't there because they moved him out. So they said, we're going to go down to the police station and we're going to get this guy out of the jail - the guy that was accused of beating him up. So they all milled around the jailhouse down by the gate.

> Now, of course, we're curious, so we all go down. You know, young kids. And the guards were all around the jailhouse with, looked like machine guns, automatic guns. And they were like, foot apart all the way around. The Japanese are screaming and yelling. And we stood there for a

The “soul consoling tower” at the Manzanar cemetery

while and said, "This is boring let's get out of here." Thank God we did. We left and went back to the barrack. And right after that - this is the way I heard. Somebody threw a rock at the guard. And the guard panicked because there's thousands of Japanese guys just screaming and shouting. So they shot tear gas and then when the Japanese are running away, somebody panicked and they started shooting them. And I know they wounded at least 15 people and they killed one kid. And he was like me. He was just down there out of curiosity. The sad part of it was when I was working at the hospital, I was working with a couple of girls, too. And that was her brother that got killed.

Yeah. So they were all shot in the back. I can attest to that because like I said, I worked at the hospital. I'm bringing the food into this ward and I go in there, and everybody's laying on their stomach. So I go, "How come everybody's laying on their stomachs?" 'Cause they're running away. So I remember that.

Oh my god. And by this time you're 14 or 15?

I guess I was 14 when that happened because before we went to Tule. But we left, thank God before the shooting.

You're smart.

Well, I wasn't smart, we just got bored because they're milling around singing Japanese songs and, you know, there's a lot of rebel rousers in the camps. Tule was worse. 'Cause all the diehards went to Tule and all the disloyal people went to Tule and all the people that wanted to go back to

Japan. And the normal people that were there before, they hated us.

I'll tell you a funny story. When I first got there, I went to school, and it's algebra class and I'm sitting there next to this kid and I said hi and I start talking to him. He says, "What camp you from?" I said Manzanar. He didn't talk to me after that. Yeah, we were blackballed because Manzanar was a bunch of *yogores*, you know what a *yogore* is? Hoodlums and stuff. And so he wouldn't talk to me.

So this is kind of a time where things were falling apart. Your dad wasn't involved at the riot though, was he?

No, he wasn't.

And then shortly after the loyalty questionnaire comes out.

Well that loyalty questionnaire messed everything up. I was too young. You know, they didn't care. You know, I'm 13, 14 years old, they don't wanna hear me. But my sister had a little problem 'cause she didn't know what to say. And my dad, that's when he said he wants to go back to Japan. You know, it's hard for them because they don't want to say they're going to disavow the emperor. And they have no country because they weren't Americans. And so they said, no. So we were no/nos, so out to Tule Lake we go.

And was the answer mostly for not having American citizenship? Or was your dad also making a point that they were upset?

I think he was trying to make a point. Like I said, he said he wants to go back to his country where this will never happen to him again. I finally understood what he meant 'cause he worked so hard trying to raise us and trying to start a business and then all of a sudden, yeah. But I didn't realize that 'til my later years because when we got to Japan I had words with him. I told him, I didn't want to come here. You made me come and look what you brought me into because it was horrible, Japan. It was a defeated country; food shortage, beggars all over the place, homeless all over the place. It was horrible. And they didn't want us in Japan. You know, we just added to the

food shortage. Plus, they considered us as being Americans because we dressed different. We spoke English. They didn't like it because we spoke Japanese and we knew what they were saying, but they didn't know what we were saying. So I think the Japanese are kind of upset with us.

Right. You couldn't win on either side. And where did you go back to?

Hiroshima. We went to Hiroshima because we couldn't go back to my dad's place because he's from Okinawa and they weren't sending people to Okinawa.

This is right after the war?

Right after, right after they dropped the bomb.

Right. So everything's devastated.

Yeah. And the thing of it is, people wanted to know what I attribute my old age to. I said after they dropped the bomb, that place had to be radioactive, the city. Well when we got to Hiroshima, I wanted to see the city. So I was waiting for the train to go to my mom's place and I walked through the city. So I must have got radiated. I said I got radiated like you save food. You know you radiate it? But I did walk through Hiroshima right after the bomb in February or something. They dropped the bomb in August. It was flat. I could stand at the railroad station and I could see the Inland Sea, Japan Inland Sea from the station. And it was kind of terrible because people had radiation burns and they were living in cellars.

But your family went back to where your mom's father was?

Yeah, but we didn't go to that town, we went over to my aunt's place Yoshiura, right next to Kure. And Kure used to be the Japanese naval headquarters. That was a submariner school — remember those suicide submarines? The two men subs? The top of the mountain was all hollowed out and they were building the submarines in the mountains so they'd be hidden and protected. So it had this big tunnel. And they would build the submarine there and they have a railroad track going down to the ocean and

they just take it over and push it and it goes right into the water down below, which was a submariner school. I worked there when I went to Japan, working for Australians. I did a lot of things in my life.

Not the Japanese?

When we went back to Japan, like I said, I had words with my dad and I left home when I was 16. But I got a job with the Australian occupation force, in Kure where the submariner school was. They liked us because we spoke Japanese and English. And so there was no problem getting a job. I worked for the Australians for a year. And then I wanted to go work for the Americans. And they were up in Osaka and another area. So me and my future brother in law, we got together and we went up there and got jobs up there with the Americans. That was nice. And, you know, it was kind of weird because I don't know if you knew, but when we got to Japan, the Japanese says, "You were born in America. You're not Japanese. No Japanese citizenship." The American government says, "You repatriated to Japan, you lost your citizenship." So for almost a year and a half, two years, I was without a country.

And then what happened? So you started working for the U.S.?

Well, I worked for the U.S., but they called us foreign nationals. When we were working, all the Niseis and people from all over, they called us foreign nationals because we were foreign nationals, we weren't Japanese. And they treated us good. They had a separate billet for us and we worked for the Americans. They had a shuttle bus picked us up and take us to work every morning. They fed us, and we paid so much for food and it was nice. I saw a lot of my friends that I knew from camp because they kind of congregated together.

And so a lot of your friends from Tule Lake who came back?

Well, most of them came back. Yeah, like me. But we couldn't come back until we had to get our citizenship reinstated.

MS: How did that happen? How was it?

Well, Wayne Collins, the lawyer in San Francisco, he took the case to Supreme Court and they said anybody that was a minor at the time all this happened, all this was invalid. And so the word got out, if you want your citizenship, you had to go to the American consulate, get a hearing and get reinstated. So that's what I did, I had to make an appointment, I went there and probably about six or seven months later, I got my passport. That was probably one of the happiest moments of my life because you feel lost without — saying, yeah, I'm from America, that's my country. They said they'd disown us. And so when I got my passport I was really happy.

How old were you then?

When I got my passport, I was 18. When I got my passport, I tried to join the Army in Japan. U.S. Army. And they started the paperwork and all that and it went all the way up to Tokyo, and the general headquarters said no because there was no place for me to take basic training because I was only one guy. So they said no. So I said, okay, fine. So I had my uncle sponsor me because you had to have a sponsor to come back because we had no access to dollars. It was illegal for us to have dollars and then you needed to get a ticket to catch the ship to go back to the states.

So my uncle sent me the money and I go back to Hawaii, with the intentions of joining the army and going back to Japan as the occupation. But when I did that I go, the army is really noted for sending you anywhere after they get you, you don't know where you're gonna go. So I says, "Probably the best thing to do is to apply for the Army language school to take Japanese. And I says, "Where can they send?" [*laughs*] So I joined the Army with the intention of going to the Presidio.

MS: Where where do they send you?

I had to take basic training in Hawaii first. Then a bunch of us went to the Presidio of Monterey. It's called Military Intelligence Language school. Nine months. But that's another story because after you graduate, you had to have a security clearance in order to go overseas because it was military intelligence. And since I had moved around and all that, it took forever to

get clearance. It took 'em like three years before I get my interim secret clearance so I could go overseas. By then I was married [*laughs*]. So that's how I ended up in military intelligence.

So actually, just to backtrack a little bit. When you actually left Manzanar to Tule Lake, how did you get there? Did they put you on a train?

Yeah we got on a train. I guess a lot of people were happy, I wasn't too happy. Tule Lake is horrible. You ever see Tule Lake? Compared to Manzanar? It was horrible because Tule Lake was a dried out lake bed. No soil in there at all it's like little gravels. Where on the other hand, Manzanar was in the desert but it was in a sort of an oasis of the old days where they had apple trees and pear trees in the firebreaks. Whereas Tule Lake had nothing growing, there wasn't even weeds growing in Tule Lake and the only foliage I saw was a potted plant in front of the admin building. Manzanar became pretty nice because the Japanese started planning lawns and put gardens in-between the firebreaks and that cut the dust down a lot. And then we had the fresh water from the Sierras coming down. Clean, fresh water. Whereas when we went to Tule Lake, the water was well water, and we were close to Mount Shasta so it was sulphuric water. And first time I went to the mess hall in Tule Lake I go, "How come the rice is yellow?" They said because of the sulfur, the water was well water. It was horrible.

And where were you placed in Tule Lake?

When we went to Tule Lake they had started an addition to Tule Lake because of the amount of people going there so, we're in a pretty nice barracks, it was the new barracks. And that part of the camp became known as Manzanar.

And what year was this that you actually left Manzanar? Was that 1943?

Yeah, I think it was — might have been '44, I'm not sure. 'Cause we stayed in Tule Lake two years.

And your dad obviously kind of took the family there. So how was he at this time, living in Tule Lake?

Well, he became one of the —

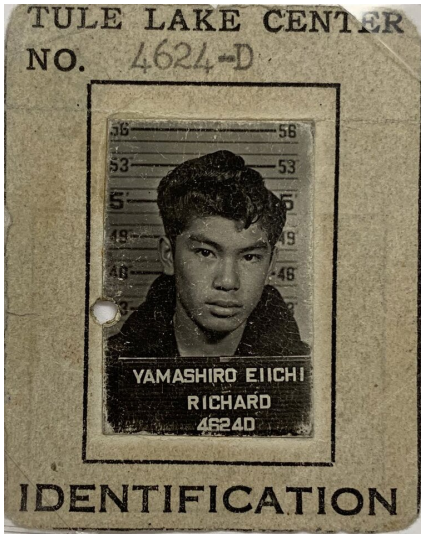
Kind of pro-Japan?

Yeah and he got sent to Santa Fe, New Mexico. I don't know if he was a rabble-rouser, I didn't think he was a rabble rouser. But he got sent to either Santa Fe or I'm not sure if it was North Dakota. They didn't want troublemakers, so they kept sending all these people. Pick 'em up and they send them out to another camp. So I didn't see my dad 'til we got on the ship to go to Japan.

How long after you arrived did he get picked up and sent?

I'd say he was in there maybe a year.

And you know what happened?



Richard's identification card from Tule Lake

I don't really know. But Tule Lake was a weird camp because they had all these pro-Japan people. I don't know if you've ever heard of the *wasshoi* boys? I was one of them. But that was only because I didn't want to do that. But then you have all the peer pressure and all the people that all my friends, you know, they were in these groups already. It was called Hokoku Seinen Dan, and we would get up at five o'clock in the morning, go out there and bow to the east and we would do calisthenics. And we would *wasshoi* around the camp with the *hachimaki*. I stayed out of it as long as I could and then peer pressure got too much. My dad and them said they want me to join. I said, "Who the heck wants to get up early in the morning?" Anyway I joined them, unfortunately I was one of the *wasshoi* boys. It's kind of scary, when we first got to Tule, they had just

had a riot and they had the armored car patrolling the streets. I go, what kind of camp are we in? It was rough. We had a lot of Kibeis. They were really rabble rousers.

But your dad, he became kind of involved.

I don't know how he became involved, but I know he got picked up and sent to another camp.

Right. Was your mom upset?

Oh, I think she was, but my mom was pretty cool. She was teaching nursery school. I don't know exactly what happened to my dad. But I know he must have been in some group. Yeah, they used to make us sing Japanese wartime songs.

They're trying to prepare you right, to go back?

Well, they even sent us to Japanese school because preparation of going to Japan, they sent us to Japanese school.

So you said you didn't see your dad. What happened when you left Tule Lake for Japan, and you said you didn't see your dad until you got on the boat?

Yeah. But I was happy to see him, but I wasn't too happy about leaving 'cause like I said, I didn't want to go to Japan but I didn't have a choice. I remember we were on a ship called the General Gordon. And we left Portland, and we're going down the Columbia River. I kind of worked my way up to the decks so I could see. And I really felt sad because I saw Portland going by and I said this is my country I don't know when I'm going to be able to see this again. I felt sad. There's nothing I could do. That was the roughest boat ride I ever had. We hit a storm going over. Oh, it was horrible. It was so bad that the boom on the ship broke during the storm and the ship would go and hit the wave and the bow would go way out of the water, and then it bobs down but in the meantime, the tail would go "boom boom boom boom boom."

Wow, scary.

Yeah, and everybody was sick. Everybody was sick. And they had us stuffed in there like animals. It was a troopship. But I found out that the best place to be is in the galley, which is at the center of the fulcrum of the ship. So I used to go down and work in the galley.

How long did that take?

I think it took, if I'm not mistaken, two weeks.

It's hard to imagine.

It was horrible. Then we got to Japan, it wasn't too good either. Japanese had these big buildings with all tatami, it was like a naval barracks or something. And they had this camp, the segregation center, where people from all over the South Pacific were coming back to Japan. So we had people from all the islands and all that stuff. They told us be careful with our baggage. And so we had to practically sit on baggage otherwise somebody would steal it. And I'm eating this food they gave us, napa soup, and we're sitting inside, eating the napa soup. It wasn't too bad. One day I see this extra protein in the bottom [*laughs*]. I quit eating napa soup. That was something else. And they told us not to wander too far from the camp there because Japan was really bad and people would mug you for your clothes. So we stayed 'til we went to Hiroshima.

Wow. So I mean, you're just mad with your father.

Yeah, I was mad with my dad because - but that was after we got to Hiroshima. I told him I'm going back to my own country as soon as I can first chance I get. I said, "I don't know what you're gonna do, but I'm leaving." And I left home, 16 and I got a job with Australians. They gave us room and board, so lived in the barracks there with a couple of other guys.

Was your father upset with you for leaving?

No, he was very apologetic because Japan was really bad. But, you know, I'm just thinking about myself. And I wasn't really thinking about his feelings,

you know, until I got a little older. I couldn't understand why he went back but then I realized later on in my life that he lost everything he had worked for. I guess that was general consensus for all the Isseis. They worked all their lives and boom, it's gone. It's not that we had any land or anything but that was just what he worked for.

MS: Did he ever come back to the U.S.?

Yep. That's another story. When I went back and I joined the army and went to the language school and my sister said, well, she wants to go back, too. Because she got her citizenship reinstated. So she came back and stayed in Monterey with us. And my mom says, "Well, the kids are back in the United States. I want to go back, too." And so I had to put in for a visa for her to come back. And my sister in law, she worked for somebody in Congress, you know she was doing domestic. And so that kind of helped. Because he helped me get her a quota to come. So she comes and my dad is all by himself and he says, "Well, I want to come back, too." So I had to go through the quota thing for him too, get a visa. He finally came back. So the family got reunited at Monterey.

But he was there by himself for a little bit.

Yeah. He worked in Etajima. That used to be the naval academy, he worked there. But he finally came back. So I got all my family back in Monterey.

And by this time, did you say you had been married?

Yeah.

How did you meet your wife?

Well, I was in the army, so I went to a USO dance. That's where I met her.

So she's Japanese American?

Yeah. And that's another story. I wanted to get married, but I was only 20 years old. And so I asked my parents if they would give me permission to get married. She said, no, I was too young. And so, me and my girlfriend

hop on a plane, went to Reno and got married in Reno. And I came back and then my mother in law says, "I would like you to get married in the Buddhist church." Because she was Buddhist and I said "I'm not Buddhist." She said that she didn't care. She wanted her daughter to do this so I had to get married again in a Buddhist church. I didn't know what the things... different sequence of events of the Buddhist church. So when it came the part of the incense burning, I didn't know what to do, you know? And so my wife says, "Do what you do at a funeral" [*laughs*].

So we got married twice, once in Reno and once in a Buddhist church. And when I got married the second time with my caucasian wife, had to get married twice, too. Yeah. So I've been married twice but I got married four times.

So your first wife, how long were you married?

25 years. And she had a stroke. Yeah, at a very young age. Only 48. So I became a widower at 46. After 25 years.

And what was her name?

Yoneko.

MS: But you had three boys with her.

Yeah. That's another story. My three boys? They're all born in September, within a week. My first son was born on September 5th. The middle son was born on September 9th. My youngest son was born on September 6th. So I used to brag I said, "Hey not bad for family planning, huh?" And then my family shot me down. They said that wasn't family planning. That was holiday celebrating [*laughs*].

So jumping ahead a little bit to your MIS experience, what did you actually end up doing through the MIS and after the language school?

Like I said, I couldn't go overseas for like three years until I got my clearance. Because I had moved around all the camps in Japan, so it took a while before I got my interim secret. And when I got that, I was able to go to

Japan. But while I was waiting for a ship to go to Japan, the Korean War broke out. I thought, uh oh, because they were taking everybody in the camp to go to Korea. It was bad.

But there was 16 of us on that ship. I couldn't understand why, but he says, "Your orders came from Washington, D.C.," because we were military intelligence so they couldn't they couldn't take us and just change us to infantry people. So the ship got to Japan. 16 of us got off and got on the bus and went to Tokyo and the rest of the guys went and got their fighting equipment and came back on the ship and went to Korea. It was right after the war started and the Americans were getting killed. The odds were like 30 to 1. So everybody that was born overseas at that time went to war except 16 of us. And fortunately I got stationed in Tokyo at the military intelligence headquarters.

MS: How long were you in Tokyo?

About a year, year and a half. And then it's time for me to go home.

And what did you do in Tokyo at that time?

I was working in the research and development place for military intelligence. I wasn't doing the language work. My Japanese wasn't good enough to go to MacArthur's headquarters and translate for him. I couldn't translate anyway. Couldn't read.

You were married now, right?

Yeah. She was in Monterey.

Did your parents still work at this time?

My dad was, he would help gardening. I'm not sure what my mom was doing but they're doing something.

And what did you end up doing after? Were you actually out of the service by then?

No. I spent 20 years in the military. Yeah, I was in military intelligence and then I came back and I went back again. And then when I came back the second time, I wanted to get me some technical, so I applied for technical school. I went to a technical school in New Jersey in communications and got sent to Georgia after that. I was a microwave technician with big dishes and stuff. And that was the only unit in the United States Army that had [it]. And so no matter where you went to re-enlist, you could go back to California and re-enlist, you get sent back to Georgia. So I said, I don't want to come back. Two years in Georgia was enough. So I got out of the Army, actually, and I came back to Monterey and couldn't find a job so I went to San Jose. I got a job at Sylvania.

But the thing of it was, I had spent 13 years in the Army by then. And I was working with a bunch of retired Navy people and they kept telling me, you're crazy because seven more years, you could get a lifetime retirement, you know? So before my one year was up, I went over to the Air Force recruiter and asked him if I could join the Air Force. And they said, yeah, you could join at the same rank with the same seniority. So I spent seven years in the Air Force [radio communications] and retired.

I wanted to ask you about when you received redress and the apology.

I was really happy to get the money which went into a new kitchen. But I was upset because my wife went to camp, but she was already dead, so you know. Anybody that passed away didn't get any money.

And your parents?

My parents were gone. But other than that I was happy it came. That letter of apology I thought was a joke. I told my wife, "I'm going to put this in a frame and hang it in my bathroom so every time I'm in the bathroom, I could look at the letter and think" [*laughs*].

And why did you think that? Specifically with the letter?

Well, you know they said they're sorry that it happened and shouldn't have happened. But it *did* happen. But it wasn't his [President Bush's] fault. So

many years after.

Did your parents ever talk about this experience with you as you were older? Did you ever get to talk to them about what they felt about the war?

I never asked them, but no. My dad didn't say very much anyway.

And how old was he when he passed away?

My dad was 76 and my mom was 71. He had a thing for uniforms 'cause he was so proud in Japan, when I would go visit him, I'd be in my uniform. He would be the proud father, you know. He'd take me around and say, "This is my son." I don't know what the Japanese thought about it, you know.

But he was proud of you.

Yeah, he was proud of me being in the army. So, that was nice.

Richard, is there anything else you want to add to the story? And is there any kind of lesson that you hope people take from what happened to the Japanese Americans?

Well, I would hope that this wouldn't happen again. You know, people get all this turmoil and upheaval from what we went through. And the closest thing now is the immigrants, you know. And they're putting them in camps. And so I have my badge. And I told you that I have my picture on the other side of my badge and it says "never again." If people say why, I said, well, they're trying to do that to the Muslims, you know, put them in camps, too. And I said, I know what the camps are like. They need to think twice before they put people in camps again. Like I said, all in all, I have a, I guess a happy outlook in life. So none of those problems seem to faze me. I look back and I did have a lot of experiences, but I'm not a bitter person like some people are 'cause it doesn't help. But I try to tell people about the

camps, anybody that would listen to me.

A lot of people, like I said, didn't even know that we went to camp. They see my picture and they say, "What's that?" Well, that's my picture when I was in a concentration camp. They said, "What concentration camp?" Other than that, everything's been fine. I've lived a good, healthy, happy life with the few ups and downs, which is normal in life. I think the biggest downer was when my wife passed away.

Of course.

And that was hard for me to take. But again, I have a second chance. Before I got married, I thought it's only proper for me to go and ask her dad if I could marry his daughter, because they're caucasians, right? And I said I don't know how he felt about interracial marriage. So I went over and asked them if I could marry his daughter and he was really happy. He was such a good guy. And her mother was so nice to me.

That's amazing.

And this is the first interracial marriage, too in the family. So I had to ask to make sure. But I couldn't believe how happy he was. He's always told my wife he says, "How come you got so lucky, you got Richard?" She said, "Dad! I'm your daughter. How come he's so lucky he got me?" But he used to treat me so good. Just like a son.

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